/46 cont./

782 pronounces a prayer the second time, cutting off pieces from
231 different parts of the animal and offering them to Aithar by throwing them on the red-hot coals.

11.

Azhvephshaa (Abn-intsvakhu)

782 Azhvephshaa is the god of the forests and wild animals.
224 Hunters sacrifice to him before setting out on a hunt, usu-
[776 ally the middle or at the end of December. For the sacrifice,
796] they jointly buy a ram or a goat. When it is roasted, the oldest huntsman prays to Azhvephshaa to send success for their undertaking; at the conclusion of the prayers, he throws small pieces of roasted meat and a piece of incense on the coals. Each of the remaining hunters repeats the prayer in turn, adding his own wishes and indicating the particular animal he would like to kill, while throwing pieces of incense on the coals.

12.

Dzhadzha and Anaphanga

782 Dzhadzha is the patroness of the crops. Prayers to her
24 are offered twice a year: in March, at the beginning of
[776 spring, and in November, after the maize has been stored.
796] Praying to Dzhadzha is not accompanied by any special solemnity; it is performed quietly by each individual family. Rich landowners sometimes invite their former dependents to the prayer, particularly those who have taken part in the sowing and reaping of their crops. On the day set aside for prayer, dishes made exclusively of grain and fruits grown by the master of the house are prepared. After the food has been placed on the table, the oldest member of the family /47/ addresses a prayer to Dzhadzha, thanking him for the good harvest or begging him to send everything in abundance. For the spring prayer to Dzhadzha, all the dishes prepared are lenten.

[767 cont.]

776 good and bad. The Hammerers (Ašatsatšap'atsa) decide the fate of the newborn and write it on their foreheads (lakhintsara). As nature gods they worship the protector of cattle (Aft'ar), of goats (Džabran), of wild game (Ažvepša), of the earth (Adabna), of the rainbow (Atsakwa), and the protectress of the water (Dzlan dzahwas'), of the wind (P'šarn'a), of seeds (Dž'adž'a and Anap'anga), of dogs (Ališkantra), of bees (Ananagund), and others. Just like the Osset, they have a protector of raiders (Eirig-ātsnykh) or Tšugurukhnykh) and one of smiths (Šyošu). The latter two, which are called upon very frequently, may be of a manistic type, derived from the belief in souls, as may be the protective spirit of the hearth (Ašа'ara), the mother-goddess (Anana'a), and the "outer ones" (adnqa) (see p. 22). The Abkhaz attribute to the god of thunder (cf. p. 87) the same power and abilities as the Osset do to the holy Elias, but he is in part confused with the incomprehensible highest god (see p. 61) and is endowed with his abilities, and therefore also the shape of the local supreme god (Anybs-nykha-dudrüp's), whose home is supposed to be the
• 224 [782] mountain Dudrüpsh at Lykhny. ---Hunters sacrifice a male goat or a ram to the god of game (Ažvepša) before the hunt, which begins after the vintage [768] and lasts until about the new year, so that he will grant them the desired prey from his herds. He gives them, however, only those animals that he and his daughter have already eaten and that he has restored to life by wrapping [825] their bones in the skin after his meal. White animals are the herdsmen of Ažvepša and therefore must not be slain.

Evil souls, similar to the western European vampires, 776 tear the eyes, heart, liver, etc. out of the body and suck the milk from the cows. They have different powers and accordingly ride on frogs, mice, cats, or on foxes and wolves. Their chief (Roskipi) lives on the mountain Tabakona, where every year they must account for Mary's Assumption and must exhibit the plundered body-parts. For this reason the Abkhaz put up [788] crosses during fasts, carry lights on their heads, and on the previous night stay up and shoot and sing. The evil souls can at the same time stay among men and on the mountain Tabakona, since

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their enemies, the god ordered the bird *aqaqab* to watch over them; the Megrelians who have the same belief, call this bird *kakabi*.[1] As soon as this bird sights at a distance a hunter or some other enemy, it soars high up into the sky, and by screeching warns the game of the approach of danger. That is why this bird is always found near the beasts.

The god of the mountains demands respect. He punishes severely those bold enough to bathe in clear, transparent mountain streams. The Abkhaz shepherds do not, therefore, bathe in these streams, being afraid of drawing upon themselves the displeasure of the god of the mountains: the nude body is said to defile the waters of the mountain spirit.

3. *Azhwèyp'shad* (gods of beasts and hunting)[2]

Azhwèyp'shad are gods of beasts and of hunting. They dwell in impassable forests, and lead an ordinary family life. To them are subjected all game, and without their will no one can shoot bird or beast. These gods kill for themselves some wild animal, boil and eat its meat; they wrap the bones in its skin and then revive the animal by striking it with a wand. Only after an animal has been resurrected in this way is a hunter granted the right to shoot it, and then only the particular hunter for whom the gods have destined it: no one else, try as much as he will, can kill it. Of this the Abkhasians are aware, and they employ the following characteristic greeting when they encounter a fellow hunter: *zp'sə-aakhèw yùzp'shùr*, "Which is destined to die, that (animal) is waiting for thee!" the answer being, "For both of us is waiting!"

A few words may be said about the way in which Abkhasians divine the success or failure of their hunting on the day of the Assumption. Before starting out the hunter takes a sharp knife and repeatedly strikes the table, cutting nicks in it. Passing his palm over the table, he says: "Whether thou sayest fifteen, whether I say fifteen, whoever says fifteen (it will be) thirty, fifteen." If the nicks thus cut number exactly fifteen it is a good omen; the gods will reward him with game.

The Abkhasians learnt this method in the following manner. A hunter once followed a wild goat, but he could not shoot it. It led him into the thick of a wood, where he saw a huge cauldron, around which sat gods. They invited him to join them. Nearby stood a goat. They killed the latter and invited the hunter to partake of the meal. When the gods began to throw bones into the hide, the hunter concealed one of them, putting in its place a small stick (or a small knife,

[1] The word is consonant with the Georgian *kakabi*, partridge.
[2] The term is construed as plural.

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224 539 according to another version). The gods revived the goat and destined it to fall a prey to our hunter. On the following morning, on his way back, he sighted a wild goat, killed it, and to his horror and amazement in its body he found his stick (knife).[1]

These *azhwėyp'shaă* have eternally youthful daughters, who often have love affairs with the hunters whom they reward with plenty of game. They select bachelor hunters as their object of love. One of them, however, once fell madly in love with a married Abkhaz; their friendship lasted for many years; often she herself visited him. One day, at dawn, the hunter's wife found the daughter of the gods, whose beauty was more than earthly, in the arms of her husband. The two were asleep on the balcony of the corncrib. A light breeze had disturbed the golden curls of the lovely goddess, and a few tresses lay in the dust. The wife acted in a manner born of pure love and sympathy. Quietly approaching the sleeping couple she lifted up the golden curls of the beautiful goddess and placed them so that they would not fall into the dust. When the goddess awakened she was so struck with the magnanimity of the beautiful wife of her beloved that she restored her husband to her, and forever forbade her sister-goddesses to have love affairs with married men.

224 Hunting is a sacred sport to the Abkhasians, and it is the custom never to talk of the hunter when he is hunting, but to say, if necessary, "he has gone somewhere." The hunters divide their prey into equal proportions; the head of the animal or bird, however, is given in addition to the one who killed it. Anybody whom the hunters encounter by chance also gets an equal share. Nor are the neighbours forgotten. Each goes up to the prey, and sprinkling it and also the successful hunter with some grain, says: "May gods grant thee a better one on another occasion!"

[536] Any kind of falsehood or evasion of the rules of hunting consecrated by custom is severely punished by order from above. The following story may be quoted as an illustration of this:—

[539] A well-known hunter once killed a wild goat, and another hunter, having heard a shot, ran up to him. The successful hunter said: "Behind that corner there is hiding another goat which you can easily follow up; it will be better to take home a kill each than to divide one between." The second hunter ran in the direction indicated but found no goat there. For this lie the gods punished not only the hunter himself but also his whole *gvari*; they have never since shot a single head of game.

[1] This story is written down from the words of A. Kardava, a Megrelian shepherd. In his version the wild boar figures instead of the goat, and *tqashi-map'a*, king of the woods, instead of *Azhwėyp'shaă*.